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SUBJECT: Goma Report for September 25:  
Humanitarian Round-Up

Following report was submitted by USG employees (USAID/OFDA) on site in the eastern Congo:

1. Summary: Of 100,000 civilians displaced or re-displaced (50 percent) in the Petit Nord in the first two weeks of September, 65 percent had returned by the third week. Ngungu was the main exception. Humanitarian workers are beginning to return to the area (keeping apart of MONUC except where escorts are essential), but so far for evaluating the situation rather than resuming distributions. End summary.

2. OCHA North Kivu director Patrick Lavand'homme offered the following overview of the humanitarian situation in North Kivu, in a conversation on the evening of September 24.

3. OCHA estimates that fighting in late August and the first two weeks of September produced 100,000 IDPs, of whom 50 percent were already displaced. These IDPs came from every direction: North in a broad area from Kashuga to Katsiru, Nyanzale, Kibirizi, and Kikuku, south in the Ngungu to Numbi area, east especially around Ntamugenga, and west around Bihambwe.

4. This figure of 100,000 did not include the displacement that resulted from fighting in the western sector, around Masisi, in the third week of September. However, the IDPs there (including the clearing out of the IDP camps at Lushebere and Bungwi) had largely returned to their homes or camps within a day or two after CNDP ended its attack on September 19.

5. OCHA estimates that 65 percent of this 100,000 had returned to their homes or camps, in much the same pattern as occurred around Masisi, i.e., out and in surprisingly quickly. For example, 25,000 persons were on the move in the direction of Kanyabayonga and Kaina after the CNDP's northward thrust beginning September 5, but within a week OCHA calculated the number at only 1500. This pattern of quick flight and quick return stands in contrast to the pattern of last December and January, when civilians who fled largely did not return.

6. The major exception to quick return is the area of Ngungu, where the IDPs that have clustered around the MONUC base are refusing to go back. One possible explanation is that, while MONUC persuaded (without use of force against) PARECO to leave Ngungu town, PARECO remains threateningly close to Ngungu. Another is that the populace equally fears the CNDP.

7. Most of the humanitarian workers pulled out of rural Petit Nord during the first two weeks of September, meaning that distribution of food and health, hygiene, and water-sanitation efforts came to a stop for 500,000 people. MSF and Mercy Corps remained in Rutshuru but otherwise the humanitarians pulled out. More than ten health centers were looted, mainly by the FARDC (although one truck delivering medicine to Masisi was looted by CNDP last week). Several humanitarian trucks were requisitioned by FARDC and by CNDP to transport troops. Premiere Urgence attempted a food distribution

with six trucks in the northern area (Kibirizi) on September 7, but fleeing and angry FARDC soldiers stirred up the populace, who blocked the convoy, which also had trouble on its return getting past the IDP camp at Kibumba. MSF was stoned at Sake (apparently because MSF was mistaken for MONUC), and a WFP convoy came close to the same fate in Goma (but fortunately was able to explain to crowds that WFP was not MONUC). In MONUC's attempted overland evacuation of OCHA and NGOs from Minova, the road south was blocked by the local populace, stirred up against MONUC. ACF staff were able to make their way south with an escort by moving cautiously from village to village.

¶8. In the fourth week of September, humanitarian access began to recommence, but only tentatively and for purposes of evaluation of needs rather than distribution (much greater logistics involved in the latter). OCHA and NGOs came to the conclusion that any effort to regain humanitarian space would be better accomplished without MONUC escort or presence (given increased popular animosity toward MONUC), except in clearly dangerous areas. Thus, for example, when NGOs evacuated Masisi on September 20, it was necessary to use a MONUC escort for the overland return to Goma (the road crossing conflict lines twice).

¶9. OCHA and NGOs retain channels of communication to CNDP, which are essential to any effort to maintain assistance to the IDPs in the Mweso-Kitchanga area (largely displaced from Kashuga), but these can become erratic and even be cut off completely during offensives by either side. MSF at the hospital at Mweso was anxious September 24 about the FARDC buildup nearby at Katsiro, but MONUC assured MSF that a FARDC attack on Mweso was unlikely, and in fact, FARDC attacked at points to the east.

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¶10. Rutshuru appears to be relatively accessible, despite the artillery barrage that took place at Rugari and the hold-up of IRC in broad daylight on the main road south of Rutshuru September 24. (Note: OCHA staff encountered Col. Delphin near Rugari on September 24. He informed them that this barrage into the hills was being conducted to forestall any effort by CNDP to cut off FARDC's supply lines along the Rutshuru road. End note.) The camps at Masisi center and Lushebere and Bugwi are worrying because the food distribution was due two weeks ago. There is no humanitarian or other access to Bunagana sector, including even by ICRC to the hospital at Rwanguba (where there could be CNDP casualties), after the closure of the road at Burai. OCHA will investigate whether access might be possible from the Ugandan side. (Note: Such a move would need to be closely coordinated with the government, as FARDC might overreact if it sensed that the border-closing edicts were being bypassed and it had not been informed. End note.)

¶11. In Walikale territory, there is concern about the populace in the Kibua area (midway between Walikale and Masisi), after the 21st and 11th battalions (trained by MONUC to combat FDLR) were redeployed forward into the Petit Nord. The populace had been at first resistant to the presence of these battalions, having become accustomed to FDLR, but in fact the battalions behaved well and the populace came to accept them. Now the populace is worried that if 85th brigade, based in Walikale, does not act, FDLR or renegade FARDC units will reoccupy the area and wreak retribution.

¶12. Lavand'homme concluded that the situation in the Petit Nord remains too unstable to give a complete green light to recommenced distributions, despite urgency in some cases.

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